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Reading Journal

January 18th

Diouf speaks about Muslims from West Africa and their enslavement in her two chapters from this reading. In her first chapter, she starts off talking about the history of Islam in West Africa, but then moves on to extensively describe the struggles of these Muslims, and how they fought their fellow non-Muslim Africans to escape being captured and shipped across the Atlantic to be enslaved. Diouf describes the hardships that Muslims had to face, and how hard it was living day to day out of fear of being abducted. In her second chapter, she describes those Muslims who have already been enslaved in the Americas and how they held onto their Islam dearly, through their names, dress, practices, and other such items that gave them a distinct identity.

January 23rd

Continuing on with the theme of Muslims in the Americas, Turner starts off his book with some history about Islam in West Africa, its rise and fall, and how Muslims were captured and brought over the Americas as slaves. He then goes on to describe these Muslim slaves in America by giving accounts of famous slaves such as Yarrow Mamout and Omar ibn Said, often giving their own first hand narratives. Something interesting to note, which was also mentioned in the last reading, is that one of the many things that distinguished the Muslim slaves from their counterparts was their literacy. Because of it, they were able to hold on to their religion and communicate with each other. More importantly they were able to organize and hold revolts and such to protest their living conditions and treatment. Unfortunately however, they were not able to keep Islam going after they passed away, and it died with them.

January 25th

In Turner's subsequent chapters, he focuses on Islam amongst African Americans in a more recent America. In particular, he starts off by talking about Noble Drew Ali and the Moorish Science Temple of America. He describes the Pan-African movement and the emergence of the "New Negro". The movement gained popularity amongst Africans all over the world to unite themselves in common heritage. In particular, people like Noble Drew Ali drew upon this movement to espouse their ideals of Islam in black urban communities, and to unite black Muslims and remind them of their Islamic roots. Turner also describes the Ahmadiyya movement from India and how it influenced "multi-racial" Islam amongst African Americans, causing them to be more accepting of "other" Muslims.

January 30th

To end off his book, Turner talks about how the decline of the Ahmadiyya movement, the death of Noble Drew Ali, and the passing of other such Islamic influence had left a gap in the 1930s. W.D. Fard took this opportunity to talk to many African Americans, and to inform them of his version of Islam. He used the Bible, Qur'an, and

Islamic teachings to create a new type of Islam to appeal to African Americans and unite them against their white Christian counterparts. One of his students, Elijah Muhammad, took on his movement and went on to form the Nation of Islam, under which thousands of African Americans united mainly during the 1950s and early 60s to protest their treatment in America and assert their superiority over whites. Turner describes Malcolm X in particular, and his incredible influence on the African-Americans of the time with his eloquent and fiery tongue. He describes his life, the struggles and political wars he went through with the government and the media when he was with the Nation, and his final departure to Orthodox Islam. Turner finishes off the book by describing the evolution of the Nation of Islam and black Muslims today, and what the future holds in store for them.

February 1st

It is interesting to note the history of Islam in America, and how it has been influenced by different groups of Muslims. Leonard starts off her book by talking about the three major groups of Muslims, African-Americans, Arabs, and South Asians, and each of their histories in America. She focuses on how Muslims have been able to immigrate from all over, establish themselves and make a name in society. She talks about their political involvement and the Muslim trajectory before September 11th. She talks about how the outlook for Muslims was positive before September 11th, and was turned around after it, forcing Muslims into the spotlight. She makes it sound like Muslims were dissolving their problems and becoming integrated into society before September 11th, and that everything was going very positively for Muslims, and that that day came and just ruined everything. I personally disagree with some of her views and that it wasn't all dandy before September 11th and all negative afterwards, as she makes it out to be. My personal opinion is that Muslims were not engaging themselves enough before September 11th, and that because of September 11th, they were forced into the spotlight and are still under the spotlight today. It was definitely not the best of situations, but it has forced Muslims to react and to stand up for themselves, and it's provoking a lot of thought and dialogue today. There have been many positive outcomes of September 11th, despite the horridness of that day itself. Overall though, I have yet to decide whether the effect is positive or negative. I think that's something that only the future will reveal.

February 6th

The topic of second generation Muslims is of particular interest to me, as I myself am a second generation Muslim, and I am curious to see how Islam in America will formulate due to our generation. Leonard touches on this topic in these chapters, and how second generation Muslims view Islam compared to their parents. She discusses the differences that separate different ethnicities of Muslims today, and much of that is due to the culture that first generation Muslims bring with them when they immigrate, and how it differs from other Muslim groups and ethnicities. The present unfolds a new path for Muslims as youth are breaking down these barriers and interracially marrying each other, and establishing a new identity for Muslims in America today.

February 8th

This last section is probably the most interesting of the book in which Leonard talks about touchy subjects amongst Muslims. She discusses issues such as Islam in a contemporary light in America, Fiqh and Shariah, and women in Islam. She talks about whether scholars should take Islam and apply it in the modern context to fit the needs of American Muslims. She mentions a particular figure, Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl, who has been a controversial figure in the Muslim world, and how his views are in line with what Islam should be in America today. I have yet to formulate my opinions on the issue, and although I do see the viewpoint of having scholars take into account the situation of Muslims in America today, I still believe that there are certain Islamic boundaries that should not be crossed and that at the end of the day, the Qur'an and Hadith are still the primary sources to take from, whether or not they are interpreted differently by different scholars.

March 13th

Maira talks about the South Asian Muslim community and their difficulty in living up to the myth of the "model minority". She talks about the backlash that these Muslims faced after September 11th, how they handled it, and how they were unprepared to do so. She talks about the difficulties that these Muslims faced and how there was increased profiling of Muslims in the backlash of that day, but Muslims didn't know their own rights and how to report these cases because of their own lack of knowledge in the subject matter.

March 15th

Aidi describes in his article about the history of Islam in America, and the struggles that African Americans had to go through, and the struggles that many Americans today have to go through. He offers that the reason why many people are converting to Islam because it offers them something which white Christian America does not. He says that these people can identify with what Muslims in America and all over the world are going through to fight oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. Personally I find it to be refreshing to see Muslims and non-Muslims uniting under a common banner and identifying with each other as minorities.

March 27th

Schmidt's Islam in America is particularly interesting for me because it focuses on Muslims in Chicago. Chicago is where I grew up, so it's been very interesting to read because I can identify with much of what she mentions in the book. She mentions a lot of institutions and refers to individuals without naming them, but I can pick up on who she is talking about just by the context clues and because I know or know of those individuals. She starts off by talking about the different Muslim groups in Chicago such as the Sufis, Tablighis, Arabs on the southside, the Desi community around Devon, and others. She then extensively delves into growing up as a Muslim in Chicago, which I can totally relate to because of my sheltered upbringing in Chicago. She talks about the public school system and going to Sunday school, which was exactly my upbringing. I went to a public school and always felt othered because of my religion. In Sunday school too, I wasn't exactly the most enthusiastic child and I felt forced to go by my parents. It

wasn't until I got into high school and especially in college that I was able to see Islam for what it was, and that's when I started to get more involved. I think it's very interesting that she is touching on these topics and covering other types of Muslims who grew up in Chicago, such as those who went to fulltime Islamic schools, Hifz schools, and others. I have friends who have those backgrounds and it's interesting to see how we have all turned out despite our upbringings.

March 29th

This is again another interesting article for me because I know Rami personally. He has come to speak for the MSA multiple times all four years that I have been here. This year especially he has come numerous times to speak about numerous issues. His organization, IMAN, is the leading Muslim organization in Chicago in social justice issues. Rami treads grounds that most Muslims dare not go near, and he opens the doors for Muslims in Chicago to become more involved with the ghetto communities that need help. I've been to Taking it to the Streets before, and I've seen the work that goes on. It is just as Abdo describes it in the article. One is in a dangerous neighborhood that they don't want to be in, but seeing other Muslims around and doing the necessary work to empower and help the local citizens in this area helps to alleviate fears. IMAN is out there doing a lot of necessary work, and establishing a Muslim presence in America that I feel is very necessary for American Muslims.

April 3rd

This part of the reading is another that I found to be quite fascinated with, mainly because I can identify with it so much. Schmidt starts off by talking about two universities, the American Islamic College and East-West University, neither of which I knew about. I would say though that it was very interesting to read about both of them, and in particular about East-West's advertising tactics. The part of the chapter I identified more with was when she was talking about MSA's. I have many friends in Chicago who are all very active with the MSA's at the schools that she mentioned. Even though she mentions MSA's in the timeframe of the 90s, I still know individuals who were active then. It is interesting to see how the dynamics of each MSA differ, and how they are compared to our MSA. I think it fascinates me even more so because I am the President of the MSA here, and I'm always looking for new ways to build up participation in the MSA and get different ideas flowing. I always look to other MSA's to see what they do, not just in Chicago, but everywhere. I've definitely been able to learn a lot though from reading this particular section, and it's really interesting to be able to compare our MSA with the MSA's that she talks about, in terms of structure, positional roles, activities, and other items.

April 5th

In this section, Schmidt talks about the differences between Muslim groups in Chicago, in particular arguments between two particular groups in Chicago. She starts off by mentioning different organizations that have been created in the American context to serve Muslims in America such as ICNA and III&E. She then goes on to talk about the III&E for a little bit as well as the Naqshbandiyya Tariqa. She talks about how the founder of III&E makes the argument that Sufis are deviant and have many innovations

in their practices. She also mentions how the Sufis react to his and other Muslims' arguments. This is interesting to me because I know the founder of III&E who she mentions in the book, and I know many Sufis in Chicago who follow this particular Tariqa. I've heard both sides of the argument before, and although I have my own personal opinions, I personally don't like these types of arguments that ensue and Muslims bashing each other. She goes on to talk about Muslims in America and their future here. I personally believe that Muslims need to stop focusing on minor issues like these that are dividing us, and should start focusing on ways to unite ourselves despite our differences, and how to come together to work together and establish common ground. Disclaimer: There is a lot behind my argument which I cannot explain in a short journal entry. In fact, this disclaimer applies to many of my previous journal entries.

April 10th and 12th

I'm bewildered by this book. I really have nothing to say except how disturbed I was by it. I didn't read it all the way through, but from what I did read, Knight contradicts himself in many places, and he does it knowingly. Just like the reviews on the back of the book suggest, Knight is trying to be rebellious as a Muslim. I've seen rebellious Muslims before, but none who have converted and then rebel, especially in this manner. He seems to be very knowledgeable about Islam, yet he writes his story in a way that is just absurd to say the least and contradicts itself over and over. I don't see a purpose to the book really, except that Knight may have wrote it perhaps to gain attention and/or to cause a ruckus amongst Muslims.